

# Government of the District of Columbia

## Department of Transportation



### d. Planning and Sustainability Division

#### MEMORANDUM

**TO:** District of Columbia Board of Zoning Adjustment

**FROM:** Meredith Soniat  
Acting Associate Director *MS*

**DATE:** October 30, 2025

**SUBJECT:** BZA Case No. 21370 – 616 and 618 55<sup>th</sup> Street NE

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#### APPLICATION

Willis Capital Group, LLC (the “Applicant”), pursuant to Title 11 of the *District of Columbia Municipal Regulations (DCMR)*, requests the Board of Zoning Adjustment (BZA) grant a Special Exception from the side yard requirements of Subtitle D § 208.3 and the lot occupancy requirements of Subtitle D § 210.1 to construct two (2) semi-detached, three-story residential buildings. The site is in the R-2 Zone at 616 and 618 55<sup>th</sup> Street NE (Square 5218N, Lots 10 and 11) and is served by an unimproved 20-foot public alley.

#### RECOMMENDATION

The District Department of Transportation (DDOT) has reviewed the application materials and has determined that the proposed action may lead to a minor increase in vehicle, transit, pedestrian, and bicycle trips on the localized transportation network. In addition, the project may result in increased pick-up and drop-off activity and slightly reduced availability of on-street parking within the immediate area. Despite these minor impacts, DDOT has no objection to the approval of this application.

#### STREETSCAPE AND PUBLIC REALM

DDOT’s lack of objection to this application should not be viewed as an approval of the public realm. All elements of the project proposed within District-owned right-of-way, such as the lead walks, require the Applicant to pursue a public space construction permit. While the Applicant does not currently propose any curb cuts, it should be noted that DDOT does not typically permit new driveways for properties that front a public alley, including an unimproved public alley, as is the case for this site.

DDOT expects the adjacent public realm to meet all District standards. The Applicant should refer to Titles 11, 12A, and 24 of the [DCMR](#), the most recent version of DDOT’s [Design and Engineering Manual](#), and the [Public Realm Design Manual](#) for public space regulations and design guidance. A permit application can be filed through the DDOT [Transportation Online Permitting System](#) (TOPS) website.

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If the proposed plan is modified to include more public space elements beyond the lead walks currently proposed, the Applicant is encouraged to participate in a Preliminary Design Review Meeting (PDRM) with DDOT and the Office of Planning (OP) to discuss the public space comments in this report.

## **HERITAGE AND SPECIAL TREES**

According to the District's [Tree Size Estimator map](#), the property has one (1) Special Tree with structural and critical root zones that span the 616 and 618 55<sup>th</sup> Street property line. Additionally, seven (7) Special Trees are present adjacent to the property which may have critical root zones overlapping with either 616 or 618 55<sup>th</sup> Street NE as follows:

- One (1) in the rear yard of 620 55<sup>th</sup> Street NE and one (1) in the public parking area between its 55<sup>th</sup> Street property line and the back of sidewalk;
- Two (2) in the rear yard of 614 55<sup>th</sup> Street NE and two (2) in the public parking area between its 55<sup>th</sup> Street property line and the back of sidewalk; and
- One (1) in the unimproved public alley adjacent to 5409 Nannie Helen Burroughs Avenue NE.

The Applicant must coordinate with the Ward 7 Arborist to determine whether any of these Special Trees have reached Heritage Tree status and regarding the preservation and protection of existing Special Trees to remain, as well as the planting of new street trees per DDOT Green Infrastructure Standards, if recommended by DDOT's Urban Forestry Division (UFD).

Heritage Trees have a circumference of 100 inches or more and are protected by the Tree Canopy Protection Amendment Act of 2016. With approval by the Mayor and DDOT's UFD, Heritage Trees might be permitted to be relocated. As such, the Applicant may be required to redesign the site plan to preserve the Non-Hazardous Heritage Trees.

Special Trees are between 44 inches and 99.99 inches in circumference. Special Trees may be removed with a permit. However, if a Special Tree is designated to remain by UFD, a Tree Protection Plan (TPP) will be required.

MS:pj